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1916

The New Poetry Series

PUBLISHED BY

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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SOME IMAGIST POETS.

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MOTHERS AND MEN

MOTHERS AND MEN

A Book of Poems

BY

HAROLD TROWBRIDGE PULSIFER

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1916

PS3531
.U37M6
1916

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Published September 1916

#0.50

SEP 27 1916

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TO MY MOTHER

WHO HAS LIVED MORE POETRY THAN
ANY MAN IS DESTINED TO WRITE

NOTE

THE following poems included in this collection are reprinted from the *Outlook:* "The Mothers," "In the Mantle of God," "Theodora," "Mother and Son," "Poet and Folk," "In the Open," "Ecstasy," "I would not be a Child again," "The Riderless Horse," "America to Mexico," "The Lusitania," "Clarion."

"To an Unborn Child," and "Woman, I have seen your Face," were first published in the *Poetry Journal.*

"The Conquest of the Air" was awarded the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize by Harvard College.

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MOTHERS AND MEN

Part I

THE MOTHERS

The Mother

DAUGHTER of mine, bride of my son,
Radiant-eyed from the love you have won,
Little you dreamed of the long sweet years,
The fledgling hopes and the half-thought fears,
The spoken joy and the hidden tears;
Little you dreamed — and less you knew —
How much of my life I gave to you.

The Bride

Mother of mine, so long unknown,
You that have called my boy your own,
What do you know of the love I bring,
The hope in my heart, the lilt and swing
Of life new-touched with an angel's wing?
Mother of mine with the lonely eyes,
Has my love meant no sacrifice?

The Mother

Daughter of mine, bride of my son,
Flushed with the hope of your life begun,

What have you known of vigils kept
In the desert land where Hagar wept
When God forgot and the angels slept?
Whence came the light within your eyes
That makes your face so mother-wise?

The Bride

Mother of mine, I know your smiles
Are tear-wet flowers of tender wiles.
Why is your garden of life less fair?
The rose of love still lingers there:
You have no hope I cannot share!
Mother of mine, who have loved so well,
Mother-hearts are not born at the marriage bell!

The Mothers

Sister of mine in motherhood,
How can he dream the half we know—
We that have kept and understood
The lover's law of sun and snow?
How can our boy, so wistful-eyed,
Child that he is in mother-land,
Fathom the depths of love and pride
That guard his life on either hand?
Love as old as the ancient hills,
As new as the youngest flower—

This is the living spring that fills
His child-heart, hour by hour.
We that are mothers of one have been
Mothers of all since time began,
Only the mothers of life can win
To the love we share for the child and man.

IN THE MANTLE OF GOD

I PRAY to a God with a woman's face.
(My mother's face is wondrous fair!)
The wide world is an altar-place,
And love-in-life the only prayer.

I work for a God with a woman's hands.
(My mother's hands are cool and strong!)
I sing for a God who understands
The worker's work and the singer's song.

I live for a God with a woman's eyes.
(My mother's eyes have made me whole!)
The very walls of paradise
Are compassed in a single soul!

THEODORA

A SUPPLIANT for peace I came
As one who, fleeing sword and fire,
Seeks refuge at the altar flame
Within a cool cathedral choir.

No bread you gave, nor any wine.
I only saw you standing there;
A mortal tranquilly divine;
An angel breathing earthly air.

I heard no voice, I saw no hand
In quiet benediction raised.
I dared not hope to understand
The faith your very presence praised.

Yet all my terror and my doubt
Before your spirit's mystery
Fled: — as the Gadarene rout
Down plunging to the sudden sea.

TO AN UNBORN CHILD

Spirit, ere thy winged soul
  Wakens to the holy day
As the secret leaves unroll
  At the fragrant call of May,
Whispered to the silent air, —
  Let me breathe for thee a prayer.

May thy Mother's heart be thine,
  Tender and divinely wise,
And like sacramental wine
  Fill the chalice of thine eyes.
Half the peace her presence brings
  Were a heritage for kings.

May her hands be given thee
  With her fingers cool and strong.
May her voice in melody
  Echo through thy golden song.
All the glories of the earth
  Wait the moment of thy birth!

MOTHER AND SON

Clear, steady eyes; lips unafraid
To question freely, to speak the truth; —
Just for a day was the life-march stayed
Ere the heart of my child was the heart of a youth.

Now the change is come, I know not how,
Still the same brave joy in little things,
The same frank mouth, and placid brow;
Yet I feel the rush of unseen wings.

He dreams at play, his face grows still;
Still and deep as the windless sea;
I cannot help, though I have the will,
When he turns unseeing eyes to me.

I hold him close, yet I feel him start
Like a captive bird in kindly hands.
In the self-same room he dwells apart
In a world that no love understands.

Even the lovers of life who share
With God and death life's open gate
But dimly see through pain and prayer
The souls they serve with hearts elate.

Once I prayed for a life beyond my own,
Sanctified by the pain of birth.
Now that the gift is come, I stand alone
Where a new soul walks the fragrant earth.

Though a ghost-babe sleeps in my empty arms,
Close to the breast where its life began,
I turn from that dream of childish charms
Glad-eyed to the soul of the man!

WOMAN, I HAVE SEEN YOUR FACE

Woman, I have seen your face
  Since your little child was born,
And where pain has left its trace
  There is now no hint of scorn.

I had never dreamed you were
  Half so rich in human worth.
Did God give into your care
  Two souls at a single birth?

LOVE'S DERELICT

Bereft of hope she croons a name,
A name that is a throbbing prayer;
A prayer that is a wingéd flame.

The low-voiced chant of her despair,
Incessant as the moon-drawn tide,
Beats upward through the empty air.

The very skull where Jesus died
Must weep from sightless eyes for shame
That such a love was crucified!

Part II

POET AND FOLK

The Poet

I was the trumpet that took you to war,
I was the glamour in clattering mail,
I was the pennon you fluttered from lances,
I was your thirst for the death-dealing hail.

The Folk

Yea, we started like a tempest
When the loud-tongued thunder calls,
And you watched us storming deathward
Through red fire-riven walls.
Rank on rank we rose and perished,
Host on host we hoped and died.
Yours the voice that called to battle,
Ours the hearts you crucified.

The Poet

Low and grass-grown were the windrows
Where your sleeping legions lay.
Sunken in a sea of clover,
There I lingered out the day,

Till a spray of blossoms tossing
Beckoned me to point the way.
Once, I cried, I sang of battle,
Joy in death and clashing arms, —
And this rolling sward is answer
To the sound of my alarms.
Life is only youth and roses —
Seek and find them where you may!
Mark this field of fairy beauty
Sprung from your forgotten clay!

The Folk

Halting and weary we stumbled on, stumbled on,
Led by your luring through thicket and thorn.
Faded, the rose petals fell from our fingers,
Hope in our hearts was a vision still-born!

The Poet

Up from your valleys I fled to the mountains,
Fashioned an altar of ice and of snow,
Worshipped a God as cold as my temple,
Scorning the battle and beauty below.
Ever the sunshine that walled me in crystal,
Ever the star beams that stabbed through the dark,
Found me a figure of motionless marble
Carved at devotions, all pallid and stark.

Voiceless I waited, and wondered, and pondered,
Lingered alone with the dreams I had lost;
Lo, when I prayed then, aloud for my people —
Out of my mouth went a wafer of frost!

The Folk

There in the valley we waited your coming,
Songless we labored and longed for the light,
While the warm blood that throbbed in our bodies
Deadened your prayer tinkling down from the height.

The Poet

Oh, my people, once I stirred you
Out of sloth to instant flame;
Then the rose-strewn path I showed you
Lured you forth to sullen shame.
When I prayed that you might follow,
You but watched me from afar;
By what guidon shall I lead you —
Sword, or rose, or distant star?

The Folk

You have strength to see the vision,
You have words that burn like fire;
We are halt, and blind, and stricken
With the weight of dumb desire.

There is little joy in battle
For the sake of clashing blade;
Roses are an empty trophy
When their warmth and color fade.
While you scaled the pass to heaven
You have left us here to die.
Is there neither joy nor battle
Near your temple in the sky?
Bring us down that starlit glory,
Make us see it like a rose,
Warm with more than earthly beauty,
Pure as are the deathless snows.
We will storm the path you followed,
Host on host all unafraid.
Dare you sound your silver trumpet
For the long crusade?

IN THE OPEN

The sunlit moon,
The sweet warm light of afternoon,
  The spurting torch of the cardinal flower,
    The wan white rose,
  The winter gale and April shower.
    O, that I had the power
To fashion these with joyous hand
In music worlds might understand!

ECSTASY

I HEARD the wind among the trees,
The surf along the sea:
Star-deep, soul-wide,
The sudden tide
Swept on and over me.

My hidden dreams, a rushing sea,—
All glorious they came,—
A blazing light
That made the night
A living thing of flame!

I WOULD NOT BE A CHILD AGAIN

I would not be a child again
For all the rainbow's hidden gold;
Though I saw wondrous visions then,
My hands were never strong to hold.

Forgetful of the open sky,
Bravely I dreamed as hour by hour
I lingered like some butterfly
The prisoner of a single flower.

With strength to love, but none to save,
I marked each fragrant petal fall.
Flower and dream found a wind-borne grave
With molten sunlight for a pall.

Then I was left with empty hands
And loneliness too blank for tears.
God pity him who understands
Glad dreams too holy for his years!

LAW

Of one vast multitude a single star
Sped like an arrow from the sky,
And we who watched it from afar
Flame into nothingness and die—
Like children smiling in a dream,
Firm in our trust of earthly things,
Still called our little laws supreme,
Nor heard the rush of Hidden Wings.

THE CHAPEL BELL

On the cornerstone of the Pomfret School Chapel is carved this cross of letters: —

P
A
LUXER
E
L

"Peace!"
(*The great bell's monotone*
This solemn invocation sings.)
"Peace!
The peace of deathless stone
Here where the cool green ivy clings!"

"Light!
The living sun, O Youth;
Athwart the marble lectern falls: —
Light!
The heraldry of truth
Has touched with gold these silent walls!

"Law!
The flaming sword that hung
A lightning flash at Eden's gate:—
Law!
The hope Isaiah sung
Is mine to sing with tongue elate!"

"King!
Thy Name is mine to bear,
The house and temple of The Lord:—
King!
Hear them now who kneel in prayer
Guard thou the temper of their sword!"

THE GOLDEN CALF

I AM the god that serves and rules,
Men I serve, I master fools.
In Peter's pence or beggar's toll
I make or mar the human soul.
By saint and sinner the path is trod
That leads to me, the yellow god.
Whether you call and I obey,
Or whether you go where I lead the way,
Be it you or I with the whip and goad,
We both must travel the selfsame road.

Part III

THE CONQUEST OF THE AIR

With a thunder-driven heart
  And the shimmer of new wings,
I, a worm that was, upstart;
    King of kings!

I have heard the singing stars,
  I have watched the sunset die,
As I burst the lucent bars
    Of the sky.

Lo, the argosies of Spain,
  As they ploughed the naked brine,
Found no heaven-girded main
    Like to mine.

Soaring from the clinging sod,
  First and foremost of my race,
I have met the hosts of God
    Face to face:

Met the tempest and the gale
  Where the white moon-riven cloud

Wrapt the splendor of my sail
In a shroud.

Where the ghost of winter fled
Swift I followed with the snow,
Like a silver arrow sped
From a bow.

I have trailed the summer south
Like a flash of burnished gold,
When she fled the hungry mouth
Of the cold.

I have dogged the ranging sun
Till the world became a scroll;
All the oceans, one by one,
Were my goal.

Other wingéd men may come,
Pierce the heavens, chart the sky,
Sound an echo to my drum
Ere they die.

I alone have seen the earth,
Age-old fetters swept aside,
In the glory of new birth —
Deified!

LINCOLN

The trump of war, the tread of marching feet,
The shrill chaotic cries of little men,
Of those who bid "aspire" and then "retreat,"
Wind-driven phantoms of an idle pen, —
All vanish in the vision of a man
Like some vast mountain, gaunt and somber gray,
Guarding the heavens that it seems to scan
For one faint glimmer of returning day, —
Then first to hear the Morning Spirit call
Leaps into life, warm sunlight over all!

THE RIDERLESS HORSE

Close ranks and ride on!
Though his saddle be bare,
The bullet is sped,
Now the dead
Cannot care.
Close ranks and ride on!
Let the pitiless stride
Of the host that he led,
Though his saddle be red,
Sweep on like the tide.
Close ranks and ride on!
The banner he bore
For God and the right
Never faltered before.
Quick, up with it, then!
For the right! For the light!
Lest legions of men
Be lost in the night!

AMERICA TO MEXICO

(ON THE OCCUPATION OF VERA CRUZ)

We do not come
With throbbing drum
And fifes triumphant crying.
We know the cost
And count our lost
Or ever they lie dying.

We have no lust for battle
Where men like driven cattle
Go down before the bullet and the blade.
No dread and vengeful ghost
Shall guide our northern host,
Our legions of the just and unafraid.

Where Cortez marched in slaughter
Through blood that ran like water
We sound the knell of passion with our guns.
No lure of land shall blind us,
And the pledge with which we bind us
Is the life and faith and vision of our sons.

Where the empire of the Frank
Drave backward rank on rank
Before the sword of Juarez and the right;
There vultures stand at bay,
Yet the northern eagles say
That to-morrow shall bring freedom and the light!

Fling wide your gates before us!
By the love of truth that bore us
Through the blinding rain of death on Bunker Hill,
In our veins the blood is singing,
In our ears the slogan ringing:
Faith is freedom, right is power — and God's will!

AMERICA TO AMERICA

(ON THE EVACUATION OF VERA CRUZ)

We were proud of our dead, for they died
At the word of command that we gave.
Now we bury the hope of that pride
In the earth of their newly-dug grave.

They died for a vision of peace
With the courage that Bunker Hill knew.
Let the call for such sacrifice cease
Till our leaders can dare to be true!

THE LUSITANIA

(MAY SEVENTH, 1915)

For that proud ship we do not weep;—
From out the womb of future years
Ten thousand ships will dare the deep,
Her peers, and more than peers.

We do not weep for those who died,
Nor question of the sullen sea
Why in the dark and awful tide
A thousand needless graves should be.

Yet we are solemn with the dread
Of those to whom the tocsin comes
Loud with the story of their dead
To wake the throb of sleeping drums.

In riven steel and murdered men
Lies not the measure of our loss;—
Look, there a nation stabs again
A bloody Figure on a cross!

How shall we guard us from her hand,
How guard from her the ancient law?
Her maddened brain heeds no command
Save that which keeps the brute in awe!

How bar the portals of the past
And block the gateway to her goal,
How keep the faith until at last
We save our honor and her soul?

No riot cry for vengeance blinds
Our passion for a righteous world;
With bitter hearts but steady minds
We stand with battle banners furled.

Not craven heart nor palsied tongue
Keeps back our fingers from the sword,—
The courage men have left unsung
Still waits in service to the Lord.

Yet by the heritage we guard
More than the cost of present lives
Shall we be judged who watch and ward
Within a world where God survives!

CLARION

(MAY SEVENTH, 1916)

God send a prophet tongued with flame
To sear the Nation's self-content;
Lest writ in words of livid shame
Ye read, *eternal banishment*.

Dread banishment from those High Halls
Your fathers builded wide and deep.
Once, twice, and thrice the trumpet calls,—
How long shall ye lie bound in sleep?

The skies are dark with homing ghosts:
With Belgian blood the world is red:
Through the salt sea in piteous hosts
Still troop the phantoms of your dead!

Shrill-voiced your chosen leaders cry
The need of freedom for your gold.
Thank God the men at Concord lie
Too deep to know what ye have sold.

Was it for this the ancient hand
Carved out the riches of your soil?
Then let the sea blot out the land,
The storm blot out the wasted toil!

Blot out the dream of Washington,
Blot out the vision Lincoln knew,
Blot out their hope of air and sun,
Bring back the night they overthrew!

Once, twice, and thrice the trumpet calls,—
The sword is nigh, the sword is come!
Awake, O watchmen on the walls,
And lift your dead hands to the drum!

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
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